

A GLANCE AT THE OTTOMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN PRE AND POST-CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD¹

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ABSTRACT

Turkish-American relationships can be evaluated in two different periods as Ottoman and Republic Period. In the last quarter of the 18th century, while the Ottoman Empire was in the period of decline, The United States declared independence gaining a remarkable place in the history. Even though the recent Turkish-American friendship appears to be the result of the political events that took place after the Second World War, this friendship can be described as the interaction of the two different geographic regions for a long historical period of time. The American-Ottoman relations that started with the commercial activities of the U.S. continued taking shape under the influence of the political events which developed throughout the 19th and 20th century in the world. The management mentality of the Ottoman Empire especially changed considerably with the constitutional period, and acquired a new aspect that facilitated the Empire's relationships with other countries taking it to a different conjuncture.

The two countries established their first official relationship in the early 19th century. In the Naval Battle of Navarino² Ottoman Navy was attacked by a powerful navy that consisted of British, French, and Russian Naval Forces. In this attack, which was also known as *Navarino Raid*, the Allied Navies destroyed the battleships of the Sultan and Mehmet Ali Pasha (20th November 1830)³ Navarin incidence created a stir in the international arena. The Americans in Izmir describe this event as "*unprecedented betrayal*" and stated their sympathies towards Turks. Upon this calamity, some politicians, particularly the Naval Admiral Husrev Pasha believed that it was a right decision to get help from the Americans for the reconstruction of the Ottoman Navy. For forty-five years Americans traded with Ottoman merchants before a treaty of commerce was concluded between the Governments of the United States and the Ottoman Empire.⁴ As a result of these developments, the two countries took their relationship a step further and started negotiations on February 6, 1830 in Istanbul.

Eventually, "*Commerce and Friendship Treaty*" that was composed of 9 articles was signed on May 7, 1830. The most important article of the treaty was The Sublime Porte's giving the U.S. the status of "the

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²For more detailed information about the Naval Battle of Navarino look at: William James, *Naval History of Great Britain*, Volume: VI, London 1837, p. 473-489.

³Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Volume: V, Turkish Historical Society Publishing, Ankara 1988, p. 118.

⁴Leland James Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830-1930)*, University Of Pennsylvania Press, London 1932. p. 41.

most privileged countries". According to this article, when the U.S.⁵ did commerce with the Ottoman Empire, they were going to pay taxes on the privileged countries rate, and they were not going to be asked for any more taxes. The relationships between the two countries became official for the first time with this treaty.⁶ In the light of this treaty, the rate of export and import between (June 30, 1829, and September 30, 1830) as shown in the table;

AMERICAN EXPORT TO AND IMPORTS FROM TURKEY⁷
Years Ending June 30, 1829, and September 30, 1830

Export	1829	1830	İmport	1829	1830
Breadstuffs....	\$ 65	\$ 2,972	Fruits and Nuts...	\$ 43,243	\$ 74, 615
Cotton, manufactures of...	4,563	29,117	Rugs and Carpets	449	153
			Wool, unmanufactured..	64,519	20,329
Leather manufactures...	–	917	Opium...	92,924	132,222
Sugar, refined...	–	827	Hides and Skins...	8,986	14,658
Iron ve Stell...	85	670	Olive Oil...	19,928	–
Printing Press and Type...	–	500	Old Copper (to be remanufactured)	14,024	3,896
Drugs....	–	432	Wines...	2,683	8,614
Distilled Spirits...	18,185	16,156	Salt...	2,125	907
Soap	1, 350	–	Soap...	1,426	–
			Silver	–	45,018
Tobacco, manufactures of...	1,099	3, 651	Rags...	–	2,289
Hats...	985	–	Coffee...	1,000	–
Gunpowder...	–	3,250	Wood, Mahogany	–	532
Fish	–	2,828	Miscellaneous...	41,930	114,159
Candles	546	2,542			
Meat and Produce	–	1,829			
Furniture	–	1,590			
Paper and Stationery	–	941			
Skins and Furs	–	840			
Naval Stores	–	692			
Miscellaneous	722	4,509			
Total	\$ 27,600	\$ 74,263	Total	\$ 293,327	\$ 417,392

⁵The U.S. got the right to establish political representatives in different places in Ottoman Empire. For more detailed information, look at: BOA, Amerikan Provision Notebook 2/2, p.71/212, 71/213, vd.

⁶Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türk Amerikan Münasebetlerine Kısa Bir Bakış*, Ankara 1959, p. 14–17.

⁷Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830–1930)*, p. 43.

The nature and the volume of Turkey-American trade at the time of the conclusion of the first treaty is shown in the accompanying table. Figures are given showing the imports and exports for the two years 1829–1830. It will be recalled that the Ottoman Empire was engaged in a war with Russia in 1829, consequently its foreign suffered as the figures indicate. Nevertheless, the table illustrates the types of goods which Americans bought from and sold to Turkey one hundred years ago. It will be seen that in 1830 the chief imports in the order of their importance consisted of opium, fruits and nuts, silver, unmanufactured wool and hides and skins, while the two chief articles of export were manufactures of cotton and distilled spirits, principally rum. The total trade was valued slightly less than half a million dollars.⁸

The successful conclusion of a treaty after so many years of delay gave rise to numerous expressions of satisfaction on the part of Americans resident in Turkey. According to the treaty, Ottoman Empire bought "The United States" corvette the U.S. sent to Istanbul for 150.000 dollars. Besides, shipbuilding engineer Henry Eckford came from the U.S. and started working on the shipyard construction in Istanbul Aynalı Kavak. In a short time American engineers made a strong impression with the new battleships they constructed for the Ottoman Navy.⁹

Even though the U.S. constituted ambassadorship in Istanbul in 1831 after the "*Commerce and Friendship Treaty*", Ottoman Government did not rush to establish an official or unofficial ambassadorship in Washington because of the political situation. However, the breakout of Crete uprising, the U.S. inhabited Greeks' supporting the Cretan rebels and providing weapons to them, and the news of their encouraging American officials to take action, made the government officials think about establishing an ambassadorship in Washington seriously. For this duty, Eduard Blacque, who knew Italian and English besides his mother tongue French, was appointed as ambassador on April 11, 1867. Eduard Blacque served as the first Turkish Ambassador in Washington for six years, from August 23, 1867 to August 4, 1873. This person was noticed to have carried out a quite successful diplomacy during his ambassadorship in Washington. For instance, Crete uprising was an important event Greeks were concerned about. The existence of a crowded and effective Greek community, their respect towards Cretan rebels, and besides their financial support, the possibility of making themselves heard by the American government officials, the Senate and the Congress required Mr. Blacque consider all these possibilities. Mr. Blacque achieved success in preventing these Greek activities and made sure that American Government followed a neutrality policy towards Crete riot. Another success of Mr. Blacque was mediating in buying weapons for the Ottoman Army from the U.S. After the Civil War, there were great amounts of weapons left in the American State storages. Upon putting up those weapons on sale by the American Government, Mr. Blacque reported this situation to Istanbul. The Sublime Portetook immediate action ordering first batch of 50.000, and later 114.000 rifles.¹⁰ After the relationships with Russia became tense, and a future war possibility emerged, Martini Henry rifles that were kept in the Armory was found insufficient.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the Ottoman Government ordered 600.000 of that type of rifles from American Government at the beginning of the year 1876, and by July 14, 1877 only 442.240 of them were received and a part of regular army troops were equipped with these rifles.¹² Turkish-American relationships continued in a friendly manner through 1877–1878 during the years of Ottoman-Russian War.

It is observed that Sultan Abdulhamid the Second gave importance to Ottoman-American relationships. The policy the Sultan followed during Spanish-American War (1898) was especially remarkable. Sultan Abdulhamid the Second who carries the title of religious leader of the Islamic

⁸Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830–1930)*, p. 44.

⁹Kurat, *Türk Amerikan Münasebetlerine Kısa Bir Bakış*, p. 16–17.

¹⁰Kurat, *Türk Amerikan Münasebetlerine Kısa Bir Bakış*, p. 32–34.

¹¹BOA, *Yıldız Askeri Hususi*, (YA. HUS), nr.159/33-e.

¹²ATASE Arşivi; Repository: 84, Case: 50, Document: 50–1.

Community, sent a telegram to the Muslim Community in Phillipines warning them about "*treating American soldiers in a friendly manner, not uniting with the rebels, and not opposing to the Americans*".¹³ Ottoman Empire proved that they did not forget the duty of loyalty to the friendly acts American Government presented earlier.

The autocracy regime¹⁴ Sultan Abdulhamid the Second imposed even though he adopted a friendly approach towards Americans was a subject that received negative reaction from the U.S. public. Mr. John Leisman, the American Ambassador in Istanbul sent a detailed report to Washington regarding the 1908 revolution¹⁵ and the situation in Turkey, and emphasized the importance of this historical event. The reports the ambassador prepared with the Sublime Porte is considered as a crucial source for triggering 1908 Turkish Reform. Some significant points from these reports are provided below:

"The autocracy and arbitrary management regime came to an end in Turkey. Constitutional Monarchy¹⁶ was established permanently. Thanks to the great changes, it is certain that the falling of the Ottoman Empire can be stopped. If we start managing the country in accordance with the reforms from now on, Turkey will improve and reach to an advanced civilization level in a short time. When Turkey's rich natural resources and present mentality are taken into consideration, it is possible to assume that Turkey will improve in a shorter time than Japan". Establishing of the constitutionalist management in the Ottoman Empire, and founding of the congress was welcomed with sympathy by the American Government and the Congress. American Government had high expectations from these developments in Turkey. However, some events that took place in Turkey caused Americans to be mistaken about their guesses. The Reform Movement in Turkey had some unexpected results. Ottoman Empire went into the falling period rapidly because of certain negative circumstances. 1908 Constitutional Monarchy could not stop this move, it rather accelerated this fall. In this respect Mr. Leisman experienced a big disappointment.¹⁷

In those years while the financial and political relationships were improving between Ottoman Empire and the U.S., Americans were observed to have continued educational and "charitable" activities in Istanbul and in various regions of Turkey. Some Americans were seen joining Ottoman Ministration and Navy. Among them Bucknam Pasha has a unique place. Bucknam Pasha who was promoted up to the Brigadier General in 1907, can be said to have strenghten the Ottoman-American friendship. The establishment of a more comfortable regime with the Constitutional Monarchy, paved way especially to the development of economical activities. Thus, some American investors attempted to get a privilege in operating oil wells, and constructing railways in Anatolia. Regarding the political relations, this period was

¹³*Traffs of Froeign Countries, Turkey*, Bureau Of Foreign Commerce, Special Consular Reports, Vol. 16, 1899, p. 770.

¹⁴For more detailed information about the autocracy years experienced in the Sultan Albulhamid the Second period, look at: Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Volume: VIII, Turkish Historical Society Publishing, Ankara 1988, p. 571–577.

¹⁵The period that started with the re-declaration of the Ottoman Constitution on July 24, 1908 after pending 29 years, and finished on November 5, 1922 with the taking out of the otoman Empire. As First Constitutionalist Period was not *officially* over, and the basic law was left unchanged, some historians take this period as the second chapter of the single Constitutional Period. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Constitutionalism", *TDV. İA*, Volume: XXIX, Ankara 2004, p. 392.

¹⁶The word "Meşrutiyet" which was derived from conditional root in arabic, was used in Ottoman Political Literature starting from the second half of the 19th century corresponding "Sultanate- Caliphate regime with Chamberand Basic Law. In Turkish literature, the period starting from December 23, 1876 when the Otoman Basic Law was declared, to February 13, 1878 when the Congress was suspended is called First Constitutional Period, and the period starting from July 23, 24 1908 when the Congress was invited for gathering to October 30, 1918 Mondros Ceace Fire Agreement or to January 20, 1921 when the Constitutional Laws were announced, or to November 1-2, 1922 when Sultanate abolished is called Second Constitutional Period. The term "Meşrutiyet" was used in Persian language meaning "Monarchy with Basic Law", but did not enter the Arabic literature even though it was the root language. Hanioglu, "Meşrutiyet", *TDV. İA*, Volume: XXIX, p. 388. For more information about the Constitutional period, look : *BOA. YEE*. nr. 2/5, nr. 71/49, nr. 75/60.

¹⁷Kurat, *Türk Amerikan Münasebetlerine Kısa Bir Bakış*, p. 37–38.

quite calm, and no problems arose that concerns Ottoman Empire and the U.S. The relationships that took place were mostly in a friendly manner.¹⁸

The relationships between American-Ottoman played an important role in building of the prewar railway systems of Turkey. Although the first railway project for Turkey was considered in 1836 when American railway development was just beginning it was not until 1856 that a concession of a short line between Smyrna and Aydın. That railway penetrated the fertile Büyük Menderes river valley and has played a large part in the economic development of that region. For that reason it is one of the few railroads in the country which, though granted a kilometric guarantee, did not require such assistance and the right was eventually waived. In fact, the prosperity which it enjoyed resulted in subsequent extensions which have lengthened the line to 367 miles. The second railroad to be built in Turkey is known as the Smyrna Kasaba railway, which connects Afyonkarahisar with the port of Smyrna, proceeding through the rich valley watered by the Gediz river. The basis of the Anatolian line was begun in 1871 with the construction of a short from Haydarpaşa to İzmit. These three lines comprised the major part of the railway system which the Republic of Turkey inherited from the Ottoman regime. Their total length was 2,544 miles, of which 257 were narrow gauge. For a nation comprising 294,416 square miles of territory such transportation facilities were certainly inadequate. The meagerness of the system is demonstrated by the fact that more than half of the country was without railway lines while those constructed were almost entirely in the western part of Anatolia. The prewar investment of foreign capital in Turkey's railway system amounted to \$ 170,070,828. In many cases the roads had been designed primarily for military purposes and only secondarily for economic usefulness with the result that the concessions provided for the payment of kilometric guarantees by the Government.¹⁹

One of the most important factors of Ottoman Empire and American relation was emigration from Turkey to the United States. In the remarkable movement of people from the Old World to the New, Turkey has poured its contribution amounting to 367,468 concentrated in the decade 1905 to 1915. The passing of the Ottoman Empire late in 1922, the recognition of new American restrictions which became effective in 1924 marked the end of An-talebe area this phase of Turkish-American relations.

There were three causes back of the migration of people from Turkey to the United States. First was the desire of emigrants to improve their economic condition; a second cause was their desire to escape from the political oppression of the Ottoman Government; and the third factor was the artificial stimulation of steamship companies, Money lenders, and labor agents actuated by the profit motive. Emigration from European Turkey was caused chiefly by the political oppression of minority elements engaged in commerce while both economic and political causes lay back of the emigration from Asiatic Turkey. The fact that only 5 per cent of the emigrants were Turks while Greeks, Syrians and Armenians comprised 70 per cent of the total is noteworthy and sheds new light on the strong anti-Turkish sentiment in America. Statistical evidence concerning the condition of immigrants tends strongly to substantiate the conclusion that economic causes were fundamental in the movement of peoples from Turkey to America. Turkey lost not only 170,000 workmen but also the national investment represented in that large group. Moreover, the exodus was so largely concentrated that some regions were underpopulated in relation to their resources and the production of wealth reduced. Wages increased slightly but the rise was insufficient to cause a resort to capital. Consequently the machine age has not yet dawned in Turkey. It is possible that remittances of wealth by emigrants added to the wealth taken back by those returned was sufficient to offset the original national loss. But the undeveloped condition of Turkey today may perhaps be attributed to a large extent to a shortage of man power as much as to a lack of capital. From the American viewpoint

¹⁸Kurat, *Türk Amerikan Münasebetlerine Kısa Bir Bakış*, p. 39–40.

¹⁹Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830–1930)*, p. 130–131.

the immigration of laborers from Turkey was desirable in early years since it tended to increase the supply of productive labor. A turning point was reached about 1895, however, after which the steadily increasing supply of labor was not so welcome. That sentiment increased in strength and culminated in the restrictive Act of 1924 which limits the number of those annually admissible from Turkey to 226. From the larger social viewpoint it is doubtful whether the supposed advantages of the steady immigration in the twentieth century of such persons as those from Turkey was not offset or even overbalanced by the disadvantages. The possible gain in increased production which might have immediately accrued tended to be offset by certain political and social problems of serious importance.²⁰

Owing to the political and economic changes in Turkey and the American restrictive law, the problem emigration from Turkey to the United States has practically been removed as a factor in the relations of the two countries. The emigration of peoples from Turkey to the United States gave rise to a political question of nationality. The regime of capitulations in Turkey and the American doctrine of protecting naturalized citizens upon return to their native land made it possible for certain Ottomans to emigrate to the United States, even in violation of Ottoman law, acquire wealth and citizenship and return to Turkey to live exempt from all Ottoman laws. That situation led to the abuse of American citizenship and fraud in obtaining it whereby Ottoman authority was flouted. Efforts to harmonize conflicting viewpoints by negotiation of treaty failed. The United States Government then succeeded in ending the abuse of American citizenship by inaugurating a set of rigid regulations concerning the status of naturalized Americans of Ottoman origin who returned to their native land.²¹

The present situation is entirely altered and a solution of the problem should be possible. Such a solution should recognize the citizenship of all bona fide naturalized persons and permit their temporary return to Turkey. The Turkish Government should not object to such a concession for the possibility of an influx of such naturalized citizens under present conditions is extremely remote. On the other hand, the United States Government, while adhering to its right to naturalize any one satisfying its law, should agree to hold such naturalization in abeyance without exception if the citizens so naturalized are of Turkish origin and later return to Turkey permanently. Such a concession would not in practice violate the American principle. Not only is it in conformity with the procedure adopted in 1907, but with the present and future small immigration from Turkey the number of naturalized citizens returning to the land of their origin in the future will be negligible. Such concessions on the part of both both Government should render possible a satisfactory solution of a long standing problem.²²

As a result, the Ottoman-America relations in pre and post constitutional period had an important place in Ottoman history. This friendly Ottoman-America relations had positive contributions to following Turkish-Americans relations.

²⁰Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830–1930)*, p. 358–359.

²¹Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830–1930)*, p. 359.

²²Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey (1830–1930)*, p. 359.

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